

Karl Gjellerup
(a master of artistic expression of Indian thought)

NICOLAE ZBEREA (1908-1990)

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This year (1969) the Schopenhauerian Society commemorates two of its most distinguished members: Paul Deussen, the illustrious Indologist, translator of the *Upaniṣad* and founder of the Schopenhauerian Society - and Karl Gjellerup, author of the renowned novel *Pilgrim Kamanita*, Nobel Prize winner for literature (1917).

Pilgrim Kamanita, a masterpiece of beauty and originally - rivaled only by very few in universal literature - as likewise other creations of Gjellerup, is bound to reveal to Western readers, in an entirely new frame-work, the thought and spirit of ancient India, presented in a poetical work, *i.e.* of artistic literature and of poetry.

It is well known that a poet is always closer to the reader's heart than a scholar, even when both are presenting the same ideas. This why the Indologist's work met with real success only when Gjellerup's artistic creation was known. His striving to present Indian wisdom in a belletristic frame, the poet contributing with all his talent, was emphasized by C. Grossman who says in his paper dedicated to Gjellerup¹:

The circles of people dedicating their time to philosophical studies and being able to go deeply into the different doctrines have always been very small. It is only when the conceptions of universal philosophy fructify the spirit and heart of the artist and are moulded into concrete shapes that they begin influencing the world of the intellectuals, spreading out in ever expanding circles. Such a case occurred in our days when the ancient Indian thoughts of the *Upaniṣad* and of Buddhism were unveiled to the reading public at large by the literary Nobel Prize holder, the German-Dane poet Gjellerup.

The knowledge of Gjellerup's life throws a penetrating light upon his work. He was born on June 2, 1857 a Roholte (Præstø-Bucht) in Denmark to a priest and, after his father's death, he was brought up by an uncle, also a clergyman.

After his secondary studies he became interested in theology, being at the same time powerfully influenced by English evolutionism and by Brandes' materialism. Despite his religious education and theological studies he turned into a free thinker, engendering a hostile attitude towards Christianity, fostered by his aversion for the exaggerated dogmatism of the theologians. But the naturalist realism did not satisfy him either. In the uppermost of his spirit striving for supreme truth, he felt more and more the poorness of evolutionism and the philistinism of the naturalist morals.

Accidentally, Gjellerup met Borregaard, an autodidact with an extensive humanistic culture and made friends. Borregaard, profoundly influenced by Kantian thought, led him to Schopenhauer's philosophy which was to revolutionize entirely his conceptions, liberating him from realistic mentality, making him recover his spiritual balance.

In the novel *Ripe for life* - considered as one of the best pedagogical novels ever written - Gjellerup depicts Borregaard's charming character, his own spiritual metamorphosis and his enthusiasm for Schopenhauer's philosophy. He admits that get-

1 Published in the Yearbook of the Schopenhauerian Society (1936). This Society, founded in 1911 by Paul Deussen, has its seat in Frankfurt am Main (Chairman: Dr. Arthur Hubschuer).

ting acquainted with Schopenhauer's thought "was the overwhelming event" in his life and work.

Maya's veil was lifted from his eyes and he was able to understand the truth he was so longing for. Schopenhauer's philosophy opened for him the path to Indian philosophy¹, enlightened him about the wisdom of the *Upaniṣad* and he became ripe for life and death.

The following years he dedicated himself to the study of the *Upaniṣad* and the Buddhism. Hr. Neumann's classical translation of the Buddhist works had just appeared. In the introduction to *The Way of Truth* the translator says:

These last *Dhammapadam* decades, these last years, we have finally learned who was Buddha and what his teaching means. But Buddhist poetry, its artistic core, are still a seven-sealed book. This side has to be revealed to enable us to know Buddha entirely. The scholars have done their work, now the poets must set themselves to the task; the Pali works are waiting for them. It is only then that Buddha's doctrine will come alive for us to...

Gjellerup responded to Neumann's call and decided to dedicate his forces and talent to it.

Thus, in 1903 appeared the *Fires of Sacrifice* which presents the fundamental ideas of the *Upaniṣad* wrapped up in legends. In 1916, at the session of the Schopenhauerian Society held in Dresden - where Gjellerup had settled down in 1891 - he offered a beautifully bound and adored copy of the book.

Pilgrim Kamanita was issued in 1906, followed by *Accomplished Man's Wife*, a little later and by *Travelers throughout the World* in 1915.

Pilgrim Kamanita, surely Gjellerup's masterpiece, enthusiastically welcomed by all Indologists, is a monument of beauty and poetry he erected to glorify Hinduism.

Although the novel depicts life, customs and conceptions in the most olden times, so far remote in time and space, everything is so vividly, minutely and skillfully presented throughout the tale that the reader feels he is part and parcel on this exciting story and the novel captivates one from beginning to end. Moonlight and flower fragrance pervade Kamanita's love. Buddha's teaching is expressed in a language simple and reminding of the olden times.

All the work mirrors Indian spirit and thought and eternal human metaphysical striving for absolute spiritual values, the search for the sense of life and for moral perfection. Like Faust, Kamanita is a seeker.

He attempts in vain to find the meaning of life and happiness in fortune-gathering, pleasures, wedlock. Like Goethe's hero he is longing for the moment when he could say to the flying instant: "Oh! stay for ever, you are too beautiful!" In the inmost of his heart he was yearning after "supreme delights and heavenly happiness". After vain struggling, satisfied that pleasures are only an illusion, disgusted by

1 It is well known that most of the majority of the Western intellectuals have come in touch with ancient Indian thought through Schopenhauer, which very often refers to Vedic and Buddhist works. So has M. Eminescu, the great Romanian poet.

his everyday life of a rich merchant, he left everything and went through to look for the answer to the metaphysical questions that were torturing him. "Home life is jail, it's mere dirt whereas seeking pilgrimage is like the open, wide sky." Hearing of the Sublime (Buddha) he sets off on his tracks and after endless striving and transcosmic wanderings and only after he dropped his last illusions and accepted the doctrine of the Teacher - which he had refused at first - was he able to reach the final aim: liberation.

The core of the novel consists in Buddha's and Schopenhauer's philosophy: about the will and the supreme principle of existence, about suffering as the normal, inherent condition of life, about mercy as the underlying principle of ethics and about the extinction of the illusion of the will for existence and the stopping of the eternal circle of reincarnations.

The same fundamental philosophy is found in the play *The Accomplished Man's Wife* which stages the veil taking of Yaśodharā when she makes up her mind to seek this way of liberation. Who is not a traveler, who is not a penitent? We are all travelers through the world, this is our penitence - is the theme of his fourth work, *Travelers throughout the World*. The world - *saṃsāra* - is a place where we are educated spiritually, throughout innumerable existences (this is the real meaning of the doctrine of reincarnation) and, once purified of all impurities, we are able to attain perfection, hence liberation.

As Grossman justly remarks, Gjellerup succeeded in remaining all through only a poet, avoiding to appear as a scientist. One should nevertheless mention his paper: Schopenhauer in these Years of War and some comments on Deussen's and Oldenberg's work on the *Upaniṣad* and Buddhism and some comments on Schopenhauer's works, where he proved to be a very subtle analyst of the Master's idea.

In his last years he found quietness and solace in meditation and rereading Schopenhauer's works and the *Upaniṣad*. In 1919, a few months before his death, he wrote the paper, *My relations with Schopenhauer*, showing how much he was indebted to the great philosopher and expressing his infinite gratitude for the highest spiritual gift that nobody else would have been able to offer him: metaphysical illumination.

By his life and work Gjellerup has confirmed Goethe's great assertion:

If philosophy is to mean something in anybody's life, one has to love and experience it.